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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION FOR THE RESEARCH  
USE OF TRAINED INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS

COMMUNICATIONS IN THE DISSEMINATION AREA OF EASTERN STRAND

## Chung Kung-fu

## INTRODUCTION

Sikang is composed of three subdivisions: Ping, Ye, and K'ang. The last named is the largest in area--60 percent of the whole--and is the original core of Sikang. In former times it was known as Kham, and in the early years of the Republic as the Szechuan Border Region. The present article is mainly concerned with K'ang, as the crossroad between Szechwan, Inghai, and Tibet, and as the highway from China proper to Burma and India; its importance therefore can be seen at once. Because of its geographical complexities, border authorities have adopted mild measures such as intermarriage, introduction of Buddhist ideas, the headman system, etc., to civilize the aborigines and facilitate their relations with China proper.

A revolutionary change in communications came when in the last days of the Manchus, Chao Erh-feng instituted the "ula" system (improvement for transport). Political, commercial, and cultural expansion was greatly aided thereby, but the system brought many abuses and a change is overdue.

## 1. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

While not as high as the Tibetan Plateau, eastern Sikkim is nevertheless a highland averaging 3,000-4,000 meters above sea level, with

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many lofty peaks, including K'o-fei-arn-t'u, second highest in the world. Between the mountain ranges are deep ravines with famous rivers flowing from north to south. The headwaters of these rivers are in this region.

Travel is difficult and little changed from ancient patterns. The land is better suited for grazing than farming; hence, there is little travel between this region and China proper. The old Silk Road was abandoned for the northern and southern routes through Sinkiang because of travel difficulties.

## II. METHODS OF TRANSPORT

Because of eastern Sinkiang's altitude and the rarity of the atmosphere, walking causes short breathing and human burden-bearing is rarely seen, except for the carrying of knapsacks. For travel in the mountains men rely mostly on yaks, horses, and donkeys. Because of geographical conditions, yaks are more numerous in the south, horses in the north. Yaks are used most for transport, horses for riding.

The use of yaks for transport is a special feature of this region, like the use of reindeer in the north, and that of camels in the desert. Local people call the yaks "mo," animals that can adapt themselves to low temperatures and rarefied air. They are rough beasts, able to travel on snow and ice, to climb mountains and cross streams. In this region a yak can carry 70-80 kg, the same as a horse or mule, and somewhat more than a donkey. It can travel 25-30 km in a day. According to the British Boxer Indemnity Scientific Expedition, in the seven hsiens of eastern Sinkiang--Tao-fu, Lu-ho, Kan-tzu, Li-hua, Chan-hua, Ya-chiang, and Chiu-lung--there are 3,740 yak herds (camps of herds and herders), with 25,786 head, an average of 52 head to a herd /sic/.

Streams in eastern Sinkiang are swift and full of rapids. Boats cannot navigate the rivers, but there are primitive means of ferrying such as hide-boats, bamboo rafts, and wooden craft. Hide-boats are round or elliptical, and can carry 500-700 kg. They are usually seen on the Hsien-ch'u Chiang and Ya-lung Chiang. Bamboo rafts carry as much as 10,000 catties, and are generally seen on the Ch'ing-i Chiang. Such craft become very dangerous when it is windy and the water is rough. Hence, where highways must cross streams, bridges such as arch bridges, rope bridges, iron-cable bridges, etc., are built. Arch bridges are mostly found where both banks are low and level, and in building, an arch is left in the middle for boats to pass through. Rope bridges and iron-cable bridges are found mostly where the current is swift and a bridge cannot be laid. The Ming and Ya subdivisions of the province abound in arch bridges, while the latter types are found mostly in K'ang. The Luting iron-cable bridge spanning the Ta-tu Ho, the Ya-chiang flat bridge spanning the Ya-lung Ho (this was destroyed in the disturbances of Ch'ien Pu-san in the third year of the Republic), and the big bridge at Kan-tzu, are the three famous iron-cable bridges of K'ang. As critical points in the communications of eastern, southern and northern Sinkiang, they are the strategic arteries of interprovincial travel between Sinkiang, Szechwan, Yunnan, Tsinghai, and Tibet; hence, their control is bound to be the object of military struggle.

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## III. IMPORTANT ROUTES

While Sikang has many streams there are many rapids in these streams and the currents are swift. They are of little use for navigation purposes. Hence, roads are the main routes of travel. K'ang-ting is situated at the edge of the Tibet-Sikang plateau, the dividing point between two natural regions. Herbert Steven says that K'ang-ting's position is of importance as the political center, economic pivot, and racial crossroad. K'ang-ting controls the land routes into the entire province. For example, from K'ang-ting into K'ang (outside of barrier), there are two chief routes: one is the southern K'ang highway, from K'ang-ting via Li-hua, Pa-an, Ch'a-ya, Ch'ang-tu into Tibet; the other is the northern K'ang highway from K'ang-ting, T'ai-ning, Tao-fu, Nan-tzu, Te-ke, Ch'ang-tu into Tibet. Each has its important features, which are discussed below.

A. Southern K'ang Highway

From K'ang-ting to Ch'ang-tu is about 1,250 km. This road was originated in the Manchu days when Chao Erh-feng was in control of Sikang. It goes through many villages and famous towns such as Ya-chiang, Li-hua, Pa-tang, Che-to-t'ang, Hsi-o-lo, etc. Li-hua has the Li-t'ang Lamasery, built by the Mao-san Ta-lai and is the religious center of the Sikangese. Pa-an (Batang) is situated in the center of the province. It holds the key to communications between Tsinghai, Tibet, Yunnan, and Burma, and also is an important town between Ch'ang-tu and Lhasa. Therefore, Chao, in opening this road, made it the highway between Ch'ang-tu and Tibet. At that time the road was only a little more than 10 feet wide, suited for traffic by oxcarts and wheelbarrows; it was called a "vehicle road." Stations were established along the line, and the tele system was inaugurated, so it became the official route.

This route crosses the Ya-lung, Li-t'ang, Wu-liang, Shu-ch'i, Chin-sha, and other river valleys, at about 30 degrees latitude, and at right angles to these parallel rivers; hence, there is need of many bridges. The advantage is that along the banks of these rivers there are important towns, such as Ya-chiang on the east bank of the Ya-lung Chiang, Li-hua between the Li-t'ang Chiang and the Wu-liang Chiang, Pa-an on the east bank of the Chin-sha Chiang, all very valuable as communications links. However, there is no opportunity for water transport.

B. Northern K'ang Highway

From K'ang-ting to Ch'ang-tu (Chamdo) is 1,050 km. When the south K'ang highway was the official route, this was merely a commercial route for traffic in goods. Merchants were mostly from Shensi, Szechwan, Kansu, Tsinghai, and Tibet. They traded necessity goods, foreign articles, tea, tobacco, etc., for medicinal herbs and gold. Tibetans came here to buy tea bricks and tobacco, etc. Recently the north K'ang highway has become more prosperous and is supplanting the south K'ang highway as the official and commercial route. The K'ang-ting-Yü-shu (Jye Kundo) highway follows this route. It is the sole passage between Szechwan, Sikang, Tsinghai, and Tibet. There are three reasons for this shift from the southern to the northern route.

1. The area west of the Chin-sha Chiang is within the sphere of Tibetan authority. Ch'ang-tu is their political center, while Chinese rule goes only as far as Pa-t'ang, so that the south K'ang highway also stops at

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1a-t'ang. The north K'ang highway, via Han-tai or To-ke, can go north to Yü-shu or Chi-shu and become a direct route to Tsinghai.

2. As to topography, except for the stretch between K'ang-ting and T'ai-ning which has many mountains exceeding 4,000 meters in height, the rest of the highways follows river valleys. The section along the Hsien-ch'ü Chiang is a straight road in a broad valley where travel is quite easy. The south K'ang highway, meeting many streams and precipices at right angles, is more hazardous and time-consuming.

3. The highway from Hsi-ning to Lhasa used to go via To-lan, the Ma-lu-wu-su Chiang, then across the Teng-la (T'ang-ku-la) Range to Lhasa. Since the Republic, this road has been neglected and most persons go via Jih-yueh Shan, Ta-ho-pa, Yü-shu, Ha-la-wu-su Chiang and thence into Lhasa. This route meets the north K'ang highway at Yü-shu, so the north K'ang highway is an important link in the route to Hsi-ning or to Lhasa.

The north K'ang highway is about 200 km shorter than the south K'ang highway, and the latter is less flourishing commercially than the former.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In former times to traverse the more than 1,600 miles from K'ang-ting to Lhasa took 3 months. The road was dangerous and the journey difficult, and hence feared by travelers. Those going from China proper to Tibet usually preferred to go by way of India. But this affected national prestige and security. The topography along both the northern and southern highways consists mainly of long level valleys, offering little difficulty for road building; engineering becomes difficult only at the Cho-to Shan and the Hsi-tzu Shan. While tunnels should not be cut, yet it is the idea of Li Ch'eng-can, who has just returned from a survey, that hill-climbing vehicles can be built to connect with the valley traffic. Therefore, railways should be built along the routes of the highways as main lines, with branch roads as feeder-highways, and with airfields located at suitable points to supplement land traffic.

As for underground resources, K'ang is the richest part of the province, and when transportation is supplied, it has a very bright future. The entire province has more than 600,000 cattle, 80 percent of which are in K'ang; more than 800,000 sheep, 52 percent in K'ang; more than 100,000 horses, 46 percent in K'ang. These figures show its importance in stock raising. Sikang is famous for its forestry, situated mostly along the Ta-tu, Ya-lung and Chin-sha valleys between 2,500 and 4,000 meters altitude. In sedimentary rocks of the Quaternary period are located large stores of placer gold not yet exploited on any large scale. K'ang-ting is the trading center, exporting medicinal herbs, hides, furs, gold, and mountain products, and importing chiefly tea, salt, tobacco, oil, sugar, paper, tinned goods, cloth, etc. Unfortunately, with transport undeveloped, the volume of trade is still very small.

As stated above, K'ang's resources are not only large but for the most part undeveloped. Moreover, the special region west of the Chin-sha Chiang, constituting about half of the province, has not yet come under the provincial administration. The exploitation of all the resources, and the extension of authority over the special region beyond the Chin-sha, all await the improvement of communications.

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